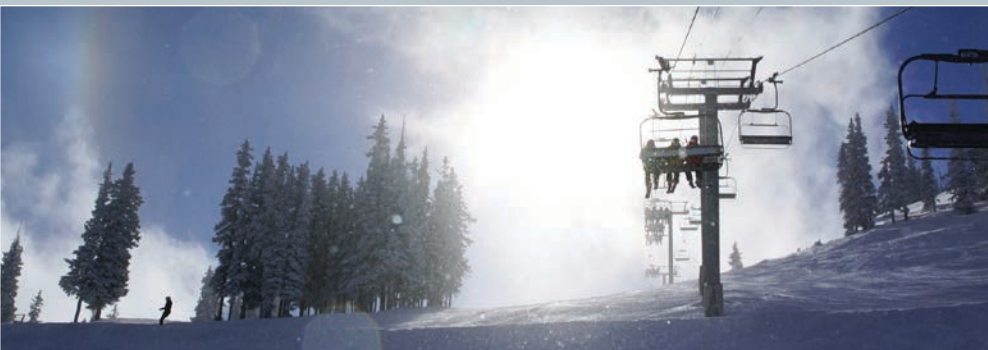
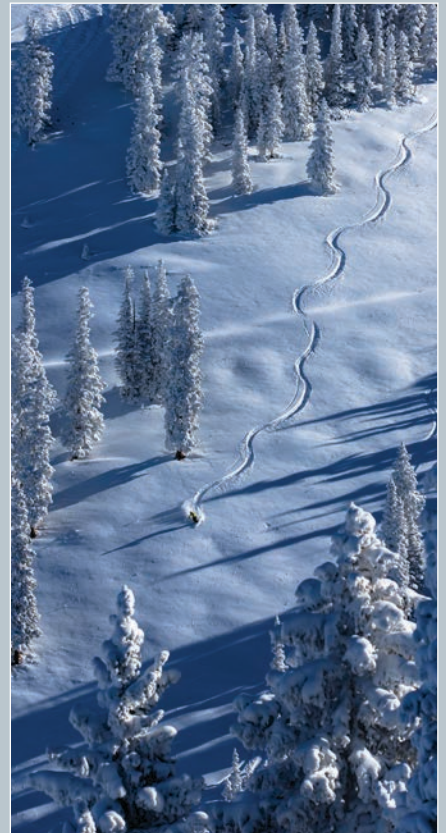




ASPEN MOUNTAIN PANDORA DEVELOPMENT AND SUMMIT SNOWMAKING PROJECTS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DRAFT DECISION NOTICE

November 2018



USDA Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region
White River National Forest



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EMBEDDED LINK	URL
<u>2002 WRNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)</u>	https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/whiteriver/landmanagement/?cid=fsbdev3_001228
<u>2018 Aspen Mountain Master Development Plan</u>	https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/whiteriver/landmanagement/planning/?cid=STELPRD B5333326
<u>Management Area 7.1 – Intermix</u>	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsbdev3_000999.pdf
<u>Management Area 8.25 – Ski Areas (Existing and Potential)</u>	https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsbdev3_000999.pdf
<u>40 CFR § 1508.27</u>	https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2012-title40-vol34/pdf/CFR-2012-title40-vol34-sec1508-27.pdf
<u>Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 40, Section 41.22</u>	https://www.fs.fed.us/dirindexhome/fsh/1909.15/wo_1909.15_40.doc
<u>36 CFR § 220.7(b)(2)(ii)</u>	https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2/pdf/CFR-2011-title36-vol2-sec220-7.pdf
<u>Glenwood Springs Post Independent</u>	http://classifieds.postindependent.com/category/Legals

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Introduction

This Decision Notice documents my decision and rationale for approving the proposed projects on the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District, White River National Forest (WRNF). With the exception of portions of the Pandora terrain development, all other project components are within Aspen Mountain's Special Use Permit (SUP) boundary or adjacent private lands owned by Aspen Skiing Company (ASC) in Pitkin County, Colorado. My decision is based on and supported by the November 2018 *Aspen Mountain Pandora Development and Summit Snowmaking Projects Environmental Assessment* (EA).

Aspen Mountain operates under a SUP administered by the WRNF's Aspen-Sopris Ranger District. The 2002 WRNF *Land and Resource Management Plan* ([Forest Plan](#)) provides general standards and guidelines for the operation of Aspen Mountain regarding its activities and operations on National Forest System (NFS) lands. The SUP and associated summer and winter operating plans, as well as other resource management documents, provide more specific guidance for annual winter and summer ski area operations and projects.

Purpose and Need for Action

In its [2018 MDP](#), ASC identified a need for enhanced terrain variety, improved skier circulation, and additional snowmaking coverage that would collectively address the skier recreation experience at Aspen Mountain. The Forest Service, through acceptance of ASC's 2018 MDP and internal scoping, has identified the need for:

- ◆ **Additional undeveloped, minimally maintained lift-served terrain and additional traditionally cleared alpine trails to enhance the existing terrain**

variety and skiing experiences at Aspen Mountain

- ◆ **Improved skier circulation on the upper portion of the east side of the mountain**
- ◆ **Reliable and consistent snow coverage on the upper mountain, especially during the early and late parts of the season, while reducing peak flows and sediment entering Spar and Keno Gulch**

The existing conditions driving these needs are further described in this document.

- 1) **Provide a mixture of additional undeveloped, minimally maintained lift-served terrain and additional traditionally cleared alpine trails to enhance the existing terrain variety and skiing experiences at Aspen Mountain**

According to a recent report in *Ski Magazine's* Reader Resort Ratings, terrain variety is consistently ranked as the second most important factor in guest satisfaction, behind snow quality. This is a relatively recent industry trend and demonstrates a change in skier expectations. While the existing traditionally cleared trails remain popular at Aspen Mountain, an increasing number of its guests seek undeveloped terrain as well as traditional trails located within more natural-appearing and remote settings. This trend is evidenced by the increased use of Aspen Mountain's side-country terrain—the areas immediately outside of and adjacent to the ski area boundary that are lift-served.

Aspen Mountain's existing terrain network totals 699 acres, including 475 acres of mostly groomable traditional trails that are fully cleared of trees, and 224 acres of "undeveloped" advanced and expert ability level terrain. Aspen Mountain's ratio of traditionally cleared trails to undeveloped terrain within its operational boundary is

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relatively low compared to other ski areas on the WRNF. As Aspen Mountain exists entirely below tree line, glades (both human-made and naturally occurring) are the only means Aspen Mountain has of offering undeveloped terrain. Aspen Mountain's existing gladed terrain largely exists as tree islands between traditionally cleared runs, and the majority of glades are less than 10 acres in size.

There is a need for additional undeveloped lift-served terrain in the form of larger contiguous gladed areas that contain a variety of natural skiable features (such as rocks, cliff bands, gullies, and chutes) not currently present within Aspen Mountain's existing gladed areas. Further, Aspen Mountain has a need for intermediate level glades, which are not currently offered within the existing operational boundary.

There is a need for traditionally cleared ski trails that offer variety from those currently available on Aspen Mountain. For many skiers who prefer not to enter undeveloped terrain, there is a lack of traditionally cleared terrain that provides a more natural and secluded setting. Development of new lift-served gladed areas will also necessitate the construction of associated traditional trails to support skier circulation and operations within the gladed area. The associated traditional trails will be necessary to provide terrain during the early season, periods of poor or undesirable snow conditions, and other situations when gladed terrain may not be skiable. The associated traditional trails will also provide access to/egress from a lift for guests, and to facilitate ski patrol response.

2) Improve skier circulation on the upper portion of the east side of the mountain.

The upper portion of the east side of Aspen Mountain within the current operational boundary is presently underutilized, with

several areas of uphill or flat terrain that diminish the guest experience. Trails such as *Walsh's*, *Hyrup's*, and *Kristi's* offer quality expert terrain but currently terminate at *Lud's Lane* and require a short return hike out to the *Lud's Lane* exit if guests wish to repeat the terrain. To eventually return to the existing Gent's Ridge lift, walking or skating is required along an approximately 1,200-foot-long stretch of flat terrain at the terminus of *Northstar*. These hikes shorten the skiable terrain and limit repeat use of the area. In addition, access to the Sundeck Restaurant at the summit of Aspen Mountain from the existing Gent's Ridge lift requires traversing uphill 300 linear feet.

3) Provide reliable and consistent snow coverage on the upper mountain, especially during the early and late parts of the season, while reducing peak flows and sediment entering Spar Gulch and Keno gulch.

The existing snowmaking system provides coverage on the mountain's lower slopes, at elevations below 10,600 feet. This system was installed in 1981 and currently provides 172 acres of critical coverage, especially at the lower elevations, to provide adequate skiing/riding conditions both in the early and late parts of the season. Snowmaking infrastructure on the upper mountain is needed to provide an effective connection from this portion of the mountain to the lower slopes, allowing for top-to-bottom skiing throughout the season. During seasons with minimal early season snowfall, top-to-bottom skiing can be delayed from the planned opening day, which reduces the available terrain offerings and places a financial burden on resort operations. The Silver Queen Gondola provides the primary uphill access from the base area and its unload point is on the upper mountain, meaning that a critical need exists for upper mountain snowmaking infrastructure to

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ensure a connection from the Silver Queen Gondola unload point to the lower intermediate slopes.

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

After thoroughly considering the Purpose and Need for Action, issues, range of alternatives, and analyses presented in the EA, as well as public comments that were received, **I am approving the Proposed Action** with the inclusion of all Project Design Criteria (PDC) identified in Table 2-4 of the EA and included in **Appendix A** of this document. The Selected Alternative will include various lift, terrain, snowmaking, skier service, and operational improvements associated with providing lift-served terrain in the Pandora area—and the Forest Plan amendment required to do so—as well as providing snowmaking to the summit area of Aspen Mountain.

The Selected Alternative, along with my decision to require PDC, meets all applicable laws, regulations, and policies. With the application of PDC, the project will not result in any unacceptable effects to NFS lands. Failure to comply with the required PDC will constitute a breach of the project approval and could suspend construction and/or operations on the facilities approved by this decision.

Selected Alternative Description

The Pandora Development and Summit Snowmaking Projects consist of various lift, terrain, snowmaking, and operational improvements associated with providing lift-served terrain in the Pandora area and addressing needs within Aspen Mountain's existing operational area. A portion of the Pandora area is outside of the existing operational and SUP areas, meaning that both the operational area and the SUP area will need to be adjusted to facilitate the project. While there will be no net increase in Aspen Mountain's SUP area, Aspen Mountain's operational area will be increased by 216 acres in total. ASC's Aspen Mountain Powder Tours SUP will also be modified to remove those acres that will overlap with the modified Aspen Mountain SUP area. The Selected Alternative is depicted on **Figure 1**.

PANDORA LIFT

The Pandora lift is as a top-drive, detachable quad chairlift that will provide access to the backside of Aspen Mountain and the 180 acres of trails and gladed terrain that are approved there. A description of each component of the Pandora lift and land ownership is provided in **Table 1**.

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Table 1. Proposed Pandora Lift Description Summary

LIFT COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	LAND OWNERSHIP
Slope Length	4,191 feet	NFS lands – 2,766 feet Private lands – 1,425 feet
Vertical Rise	1,220 feet	N/A
Average Grade	31%	N/A
Design Capacity	2,000 pph	N/A
Top Terminal	11,260 feet elevation	Private lands
Bottom Terminal	10,040 feet elevation	NFS lands

In addition to serving the Pandora terrain, the lift alignment was designed to allow the Pandora lift to service several existing trails on Aspen Mountain's east side such as *Walsh's*, *Hyrup's*, and *Kristie's*, and to lengthen this terrain. The top terminal will be located approximately 950 feet south and slightly east of the Silver Queen Gondola's top terminal and will serve the maximum amount of terrain within the Pandora area. The location of the top terminal was chosen to provide direct access to the Sundeck Restaurant. The bottom terminal will be located approximately 1,500 feet downslope of the existing lower boundary of *Walsh's*.

Access routes to the bottom terminal will be necessary for construction and annual maintenance. Approximately 3,000 feet of an existing and abandoned logging/mining road is present within the lower portion of the Pandora area and will be used for temporary construction activities and later reclaimed (refer to the *Construction Practices* discussion later in this section). Long-term maintenance access will be provided by an approved access road/ski trail (Trail P12) from the

bottom terminal to *Northstar* trail that includes a gabion wall (a retaining wall made of stacked stone-filled wirework containers) to cross an ephemeral drainage. From the intersection of Trail P12 with *Northstar*, the access road will follow *Northstar* south until the intersection with Loushin's Road. The access road will be approximately 4,300 feet in total length from the Pandora lift bottom terminal to the intersection with Loushin's Road, constructed with an average grade of 8 percent, and located primarily on NFS lands.

Electricity will be provided to the bottom terminal from an approved powerline that will be buried along the approved access road/P12 ski trail alignment; the upper segment of this power line will be buried on private lands. Electricity will be provided to the top terminal from an approved buried powerline originating at the existing maintenance facility that will be buried within an existing access road.

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PANDORA TRAILS

Approximately 79 acres of traditional trails and 101 acres of gladed trails will be developed within the Pandora area, for a total of 180 acres of new terrain at Aspen Mountain. Of these 180 acres, approximately 72 acres will be located on NFS lands and approximately 108 acres will be located on

private lands. All the terrain will be accessed by the approved Pandora lift. Gladed terrain will consist primarily of expert- and intermediate-level terrain, while the traditional trails will provide a mixture of low-intermediate-, intermediate-, and expert-level terrain. A detailed description of the approved Pandora trails by ability level is provided in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Proposed Pandora Trails by Ability Level

TRAIL NAME	ABILITY LEVEL	ACRES
P1	Expert	8.9
P2	Expert	5.1
P3	Expert	1.9
P4	Intermediate	8.1
P5	Intermediate	6.4
P6	Intermediate	11.6
P7	Intermediate	1.2
P8	Intermediate	5.5
P9	Expert	7.1
P10	Expert	4.5
P11	Expert	3.5
P12	Intermediate	3.8
P13	Low Intermediate	0.8
P14	Expert	2.6
P15	Expert	6.5
Egress Route	n/a	2.0
G1	Gladed	101
Total		180.5

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Users will have several options to access these approved trails: (1) via the mountain summit through existing expert-level terrain; (2) via repeat use of the approved Pandora lift; or (3) via intermediate trails like the *Copper Trail*.

An egress ski trail will be constructed along the eastern-most edge of the adjusted operational boundary to return skiers to the Pandora lift bottom terminal. This egress trail will be constructed to a width of 20 to 30 feet. During winter operations, the approved access road to the Pandora bottom terminal will be used as a ski trail to provide ski patrol snowmobile emergency access/egress to/from the area, or in the event of lift failure. Additionally, a public “snow road” will be constructed annually around the Pandora top terminal location for wintertime public motorized access between Richmond Ridge and Midnight Mine Road. Historically, the lands south of the Aspen Mountain summit are a mix of private and public properties to which the general public has access for winter travel. The public “snow road” will allow for the successful operation of the approved Pandora area, while also providing

continued public access to lands historically permissible for winter travel south of the Aspen Mountain summit.

Details regarding the ski trail construction methodology, including tree removal and grading, are provided in the *Construction Practices* discussion later in this section. Minor modifications to ski trail alignments could be made based on actual ground conditions encountered during the construction phase and to achieve necessary grades; however, these modified alignments will be required to result in similar disturbance and impacts as described in this EA.

SUMMIT SNOWMAKING

Additional snowmaking infrastructure is approved for the summit of Aspen Mountain on six trails, covering approximately 53 acres in total (26 acres on NFS lands and 27 acres on private lands), and spanning from the highest elevation of the existing system to the summit of the mountain. A detailed description of the approved additional snowmaking coverage by land ownership is provided in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Proposed Snowmaking Coverage by Land Ownership

TRAIL	PRIVATE LANDS (ACRES)	NFS LANDS (ACRES)	TOTAL (ACRES)
<i>One and Two Leaf</i>	3.6	5	8.6
<i>Silver Bell</i>	4.5	5.5	10
<i>Dipsy Doodle</i>	7	8	15
<i>Buckhorn</i>	2.9	3.6	6.5
<i>North American</i>	4.5	0	4.5
<i>Copper Trail</i>	4.4	3.6	8
Total	26.9	25.7	52.6

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This approved snowmaking will require the installation of underground water/air pipes and electrical wiring, as well as the construction of the following supporting components:

- ◆ Pump station – A new approximately 1,500-square foot pump station will be constructed near Gent’s Ridge Pond and entirely on NFS lands. The capacity of this pump station will be 1,800 gallons per minute.
- ◆ Gent’s Ridge 2 storage pond – An approximately 3.5-million gallon capacity storage pond will be constructed near the bottom terminal of the Gent’s Ridge lift and south of the existing Gent’s Ridge 1 storage pond. The surface area of the pond will be approximately 1 acre, with the majority of the surface area located on NFS lands.
- ◆ Gent’s Ridge 3 storage pond – An approximately 1.75-million gallon capacity storage pond will be constructed almost entirely on NFS lands and immediately south of the approved Gent’s Ridge 2 storage pond. The surface area of the pond will be approximately 1 acre.
- ◆ *One and Two Leaf/Silver Bell/Copper* snowmaking pipeline – Approximately 1.6 miles of snowmaking pipeline will be buried near *One and Two Leaf*, *Silver Bell*, and *Copper* trails. Approximately 53 percent of this pipeline will be on NFS lands.
- ◆ *Dipsy Doodle/Buckhorn/North American* snowmaking pipeline – Approximately 1.5 miles of snowmaking pipeline will be buried near *Dipsy Doodle*, *Buckhorn*, and *North American* trails. Approximately 28 percent of this pipeline will be located on NFS lands.
- ◆ Gent’s Ridge 1 storage pond pipeline – An approximately 600-foot-long pipeline from the existing Gent’s Ridge 1 Pond will

be buried to connect the pond to an existing pipeline, located entirely on private lands.

The new pump station and storage ponds will allow this upper mountain snowmaking infrastructure to operate independently from the existing snowmaking system on the lower mountain. Approximately 10 million gallons of water storage will be required to operate the new system. This additional water storage will allow snowmaking to be concentrated during periods of colder weather, which will minimize snowmelt and result in an overall improvement to the energy efficiency of the snowmaking system. Water storage on the upper mountain will also increase efficiency for the snowmaking system, by eliminating the need to run the lower mountain snowmaking pumps uphill.

Because there are minimal on-mountain water sources available near the approved storage ponds, the ponds will not be stream-fed and will instead be filled by surface runoff from immediate surrounding areas and by the snowmaking system as necessary, including the initial filling following construction. The ponds will be lined to avoid leakage, engineered to address overflow, and will be classified as non-jurisdictional by Colorado Division of Water Resources standards. The ponds will utilize natural topography of the surrounding area and will be designed to allow wildlife ingress and egress.

SNOWMAKING RUNOFF MANAGEMENT

Of the 53 acres of approved snowmaking coverage, 29.7 acres will be located on ski trails within the Spar Gulch watershed. Spar Gulch flows along the front side of Aspen Mountain and discharges to the City of Aspen’s storm sewer system. A portion of the surface runoff originating on higher

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elevations of the Spar Gulch watershed, including the approved snowmaking, is intercepted by Summer Ditch, a drainage ditch predating the Aspen Mountain ski area that discharges into Keno Gulch located on the west side of Aspen Mountain. The remaining 23.1 acres of snowmaking will be located on terrain that drains towards unnamed channels (Tributary #1, Tributary #2, and Tributary #3) on the east side of the mountain.

To minimize the amount of additional runoff entering Keno Gulch during peak flow periods, a splitter box will be installed on Spar Gulch just above Summer Ditch to maintain current volumes of runoff diverted towards Keno Gulch. The remaining snowmaking runoff will flow down Spar Gulch. The size and design of the splitter box will be identified in final drainage management and design plans, which will be submitted to the Forest Service for review and approval prior to construction of the snowmaking improvements.

With the splitter box in place, runoff associated with the approved snowmaking will enter the Spar Gulch channel. PDC have been incorporated into the Selected Alternative to reduce the peak flow of runoff in Spar Gulch and runoff entering the City of Aspen's storm sewer system, as well as reduce the amount of sediment associated with this runoff. Refer to **Appendix A**.

The existing Gent's Ridge 1 storage pond and approved Gent's Ridge 2 and Gent's Ridge 3 storage ponds will be used to capture and store runoff originating in the Tributary #1 and Tributary #2 watersheds for later use and/or discharge. The existing Gent's Ridge 1 storage pond and the approved Gent's Ridge 2 and Gent's Ridge 3 storage ponds will contain a combined on-mountain storage capacity of 26.9 acre-feet, though the amount of runoff entering the ponds may not

be sufficient to fill the ponds to their maximum storage capacity. Following the end of the snowmaking season, typically in January, the ponds will remain empty until snowmelt is actively occurring at the higher elevation trails (late-May to mid-June), and the ponds will be allowed to fill. Should the ponds near their storage capacity, the outlet valves will be opened to allow water to drain and to maintain the ponds at or near capacity.

CONSTRUCTION PRACTICES

The location of the Pandora lift top terminal has been selected to minimize the amount of ground disturbance and timber removal required and to retain vegetative screening and wind protection. The location of the Pandora lift bottom terminal will align with a natural land bench, reducing the amount of grading required for its installation. An approximately 25-foot-wide vegetative buffer will be maintained behind and below the bottom terminal to visually screen it from the valley below. The lift maze will be located on both sides of the bottom terminal, which will require approximately 50 feet of timber removal on either side of and behind the terminal location to provide adequate room for skier circulation and grooming.

Construction access to the Pandora terrain will occur using the existing Summer Road and Little Annie Road to the top terminal location. As previously discussed, approximately 3,000 feet of an abandoned logging/mining road will be used for temporary construction access to the lower terminal location as well as timber skidding. The average width of the existing road is approximately 10 feet and will require widening to an average of approximately 14 feet to accommodate construction vehicles, and a width of approximately 25 feet at road turns. Following construction, the abandoned logging/mining road will be

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reclaimed to original (pre-road) contours and reseeded.

Snowmaking pipelines will be buried within a 5-foot-deep trench located within a 70-foot-wide construction corridor near the trail edges. Hydrants and/or electric pedestals will be spaced approximately 150 feet apart and connected to the main snowmaking pipeline by 2-inch-diameter buried lateral piping. Underground air pipelines and electrical wire will also be installed within the construction corridor. The entire 70-foot-wide construction corridor will be revegetated upon project completion.

ASC will place staging areas and log decks on private lands and within areas of approved disturbance or previously disturbed areas where feasible (refer to **Figure 1**). The approved lift tower foundation concrete and tower materials will be transported to the respective sites by helicopter.

Tree Removal

Trails and gladed areas will be constructed by flush cutting the timber to minimize ground disturbance and preserve the surface soil horizon. Timber removal may be performed “over snow” to minimize ground disturbance. Where “over snow” timber removal is not feasible, timber will be removed conventionally with skidders and logging trucks.

Traditional trail development will utilize natural openings and glades to the extent practicable. The traditional trails will include interspersed tree clusters within each trail to provide a varied experience and to lessen impacts to the area’s scenic character. Construction of traditional trails will result in 26 acres of vegetation removal on NFS lands and 24 acres of vegetation removal on private lands.

Glading will be conducted to open skiable lines while maintaining age and species class diversity of the tree stands. Approximately 30 to 40 percent of tree basal area will be cleared from gladed areas; however, some areas are naturally gladed and will require little tree removal. The shape of new openings and ski runs in the forest canopy will appear natural and blend into the surrounding vegetation. In gladed areas, where practicable, some amount of timber will be lopped and scattered parallel with the fall line. Within the 101 acres of approved gladed terrain, approximately 12.7 acres of vegetation will be removed on NFS lands and 27.7 acres will be removed on private lands.

Given the vegetation clearing for traditional and gladed trails—as well as for the Pandora lift, access roads, skier egress trail, trail grading, power line construction, and snowmaking ponds development—approximately 106 acres of trees will be cleared. Assuming 40 tons of trees removed per acre and a truck capacity of 25 tons per load, this will result in approximately 4,226 tons of timber removed and will require approximately 169 truckloads to remove (338 roundtrip truck trips). This logging will occur over the course of June, July, and August and will result in approximately 2 truckloads per day (4 roundtrip truck trips per day). All trucks longer than 30 feet will travel along Castle Creek Road for approximately 6.8 miles and then turn left onto Little Annie’s Road for approximately 5.5 miles to reach Loushin’s Road and the project area. Trucks shorter than 30 feet long (single axle) may take the same route or the Aspen Mountain Summer Road.

Grading

Grading will be necessary for the following approved project components:

- ◆ Top and bottom terminals of the Pandora lift

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- ◆ New trail breakovers from flatter to steeper terrain
- ◆ Pandora boundary egress ski trail
- ◆ Pandora temporary construction access road
- ◆ Pandora long-term maintenance bottom terminal access road
- ◆ To remove an overhead powerline and bury it along a similar alignment on private land in the southern portion of the Pandora area
- ◆ To facilitate intermediate access to the *Loushin Traverse* and the bottom terminal of the Pandora lift in several locations
- ◆ To facilitate return skier access from the top of the Pandora lift to the Sundeck Restaurant

SUP/OPERATIONAL BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS AND FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT

A Forest Plan amendment is required to accommodate the approved Pandora terrain area (ski trails) located outside of Aspen Mountain's existing SUP boundary that is currently designated as [Management Area 7.1 – Intermix](#). This ski terrain development requires that the [Forest Plan](#) be amended to incorporate these areas into the Aspen Mountain SUP boundary and results in the conversion of approximately 22.5 acres of NFS lands currently designated as Management Area 7.1 to [Management Area 8.25 – Ski Areas \(Existing and Potential\)](#). To achieve a no net increase of the SUP area, an equal amount of lands currently within the SUP area and Management Area 8.25 will be removed from the SUP area and reallocated to Management Area 7.1. The location of the withdrawn area is depicted on **Figure 1**. The 22.5 acres of land currently within Aspen Mountain's SUP area that are withdrawn possess similar ecological values to those lands approved for inclusion in Aspen

Mountain's SUP. In addition, ASC's Aspen Mountain Powder Tours SUP will also be modified to remove those acres that overlap with the modified Aspen Mountain SUP area. Refer to Appendix A of the EA for additional detail regarding the Forest Plan amendment.

PROJECT DESIGN CRITERIA

PDC have been applied to avoid and minimize potential resource impacts from construction and operation of the Selected Alternative. These PDC are identified in Table 2-4 of the EA and **Appendix A** of this document. This list supplements the list of BMPs that ASC will be required to prepare for Forest Service prior to the start of construction and implementation.

Rationale for My Decision

In reaching my decision I relied heavily upon an Interdisciplinary (ID) Team composed of Forest Service resource specialists who analyzed the effects of the Proposed Action documented in the EA. I considered the following issues and concerns: anticipated effects to recreation, scenery, cultural resources, soils and geotechnical, watershed, vegetation, wildlife and aquatics, and air quality. I also understand that certain resources were not carried forward in detailed analysis for the EA; however, those resources were considered by the ID Team and determined to be eliminated from detailed analysis with rationale. I also reviewed the PDC included in the EA, as well as public comments received during the 30-day scoping/comment period and considered how the Selected Alternative will respond to the stated Purpose and Need.

In reviewing the qualitative and quantitative effects on the human and biological environment presented in the EA, I find they have been adequately addressed and disclosed. I considered impacts to the full

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range of resources affecting the human, biological, and physical environments. I have reviewed the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts. Through the application of appropriate PDC identified to minimize impacts to the resources of concern, I feel confident that potential impacts have been thoroughly assessed and disclosed.

I recognize that the project may affect the Spar Gulch and Keno Gulch watersheds as well as the broader Roaring Fork Valley watershed, including Maroon and Castle Creeks. However, watershed and geotechnical-specific PDC and drainage management improvements approved for this project will mitigate these impacts on both Spar Gulch and Keno Gulch. In addition, the water use approved for this project will ultimately be beholden to instream flow requirements for stream health. Under existing authority, Aspen Mountain can only draw water through the City of Aspen's diversions from Castle Creek and Maroon Creek if stream flows are high enough to handle the withdrawals without falling below the instream flow amount.

I also understand there is concern over impacts to wildlife that currently use the Pandora area, specifically elk and Canada lynx. I believe the additional impacts from the proposal will be negligible given that recent wildlife surveys indicate minimal use by the species, and that the area, after decades of use by backcountry users, already has lower suitability as habitat.

There are other potential impacts to the project including the potential displacement of backcountry users that currently use the Pandora area, and the scenic impacts from certain viewsheds. In the context of the existing developed conditions at Aspen Mountain and the potential benefits to the Aspen Mountain guests, I believe the benefits outweigh the potential costs. Overall, I feel

my decision will improve the experience of guests to the Forest within the Aspen Mountain SUP area in conjunction with the stated environmental impacts.

Other Alternatives Considered

The Proposed Action was the only alternative analyzed in detail in the EA. In accordance with [Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 40, Section 41.22](#), and [36 CFR § 220.7\(b\)\(2\)\(ii\)](#), the EA did not include an analysis of the No Action Alternative; however, numerous other alternatives were considered early in the NEPA process. These alternatives were thoroughly considered by the Forest Service against Forest Plan direction and were not carried forward into detailed analysis (refer to Section 2.2.2 of the EA).

Public Involvement

In May 2018 a Notice of Proposed Action was mailed or emailed to 57 community residents, interested individuals, government officials, public agencies, tribal governments, and other organizations, initiating a 30-day comment period. 20 comment letters were received during scoping and were then utilized by the ID Team to identify substantive issues and to consider potential alternatives to the Proposed Action. I considered these comments and provided a response to them (refer to the Response to Comments document located in the project file). After reviewing public comments, as well as internal concerns raised by Forest Service specialists, a final list of issues was assembled that helped guide subsequent analysis. Issues are identified in Chapter 1 of the EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (according to [40 CFR § 1508.27](#)). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. Refer to Appendix B of the EA for the explanation of the Finding of No Significant Impact.

Findings Requirement by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 and all other laws, regulations, and policies that govern Forest Service actions. Site-specific PDC (**Appendix A**) and Forest Plan standards and guidelines will be applied, as appropriate, to meet Forest Plan goals and desired conditions. While the Forest Service assumes no responsibility for enforcing laws, regulations, or ordinances under the jurisdiction of other governmental agencies, Forest Service regulations require permittees to abide by applicable laws and conditions imposed by other jurisdictions. The project was designed to conform to the Forest Plan and all other laws, regulations, and policies, including: U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Endangered Species Act Informal Section 7 Consultation; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Clean Water Act 404 Permit; State of Colorado's Stormwater Management Plan and Burn Permit; Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands; and Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management.

Opportunity to Object the Proposed Project

This decision is subject to the objection processes pursuant to 36 CFR § 218.8 (Project-level components objection) and 36 CFR § 219.54 (Forest Plan amendment objection). Objections will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted specific written or substantive formal comments regarding the proposed project or Forest Plan Amendment during a comment period in accordance with 36 CFR § 218.5(a) or 36 CFR § 219.53. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted, timely, and specific written or substantive formal comments regarding the proposed project, unless comments are based on new information that arose after the designated comment opportunities.

Incorporation of documents by reference is not allowed, except for the following items that may be referenced by including date, page, and section of the cited document, along with a description of its content and applicability to the objection: 1) All or any part of a federal law or regulation; 2) Forest Service directives and land management plans; 3) Documents referenced by the Forest Service in the proposed project environmental analysis document that is subject to objection. All other documents must be included with the objection.

At a minimum, an objection must include the following: objector's name and physical mailing address; signature or other verification of authorship upon request; identification of the lead objector when multiple names are listed; name of the proposed project; name and title of Responsible Official; and name of national forest unit(s) on which the project will be

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implemented (36 CFR § 218.8(d) or 36 CFR § 219.54(c)).

Objections, including attachments, must be filed via mail, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Objection Reviewing Officer, USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, 1617 Cole Blvd. Building 17, Golden, CO 80401; fax: (303) 275-5134 to the attention of Objections or Email: r02admin_review@fs.fed.us. Electronic objections must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), Portable Document Format (.pdf), rich text format (.rtf), or MS Word (.doc). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the [Glenwood Springs Post Independent](#). The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to 36 CFR § 218.9 or 36 CFR § 219.56, which includes: date of U.S. Postal Service postmark or shipping date for delivery by private carrier for an objection received before the close of the fifth business day after the objection filing period; agency's electronically generated date and time for email and facsimiles; or official agency date stamp showing receipt of hand delivery. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

Implementation Date

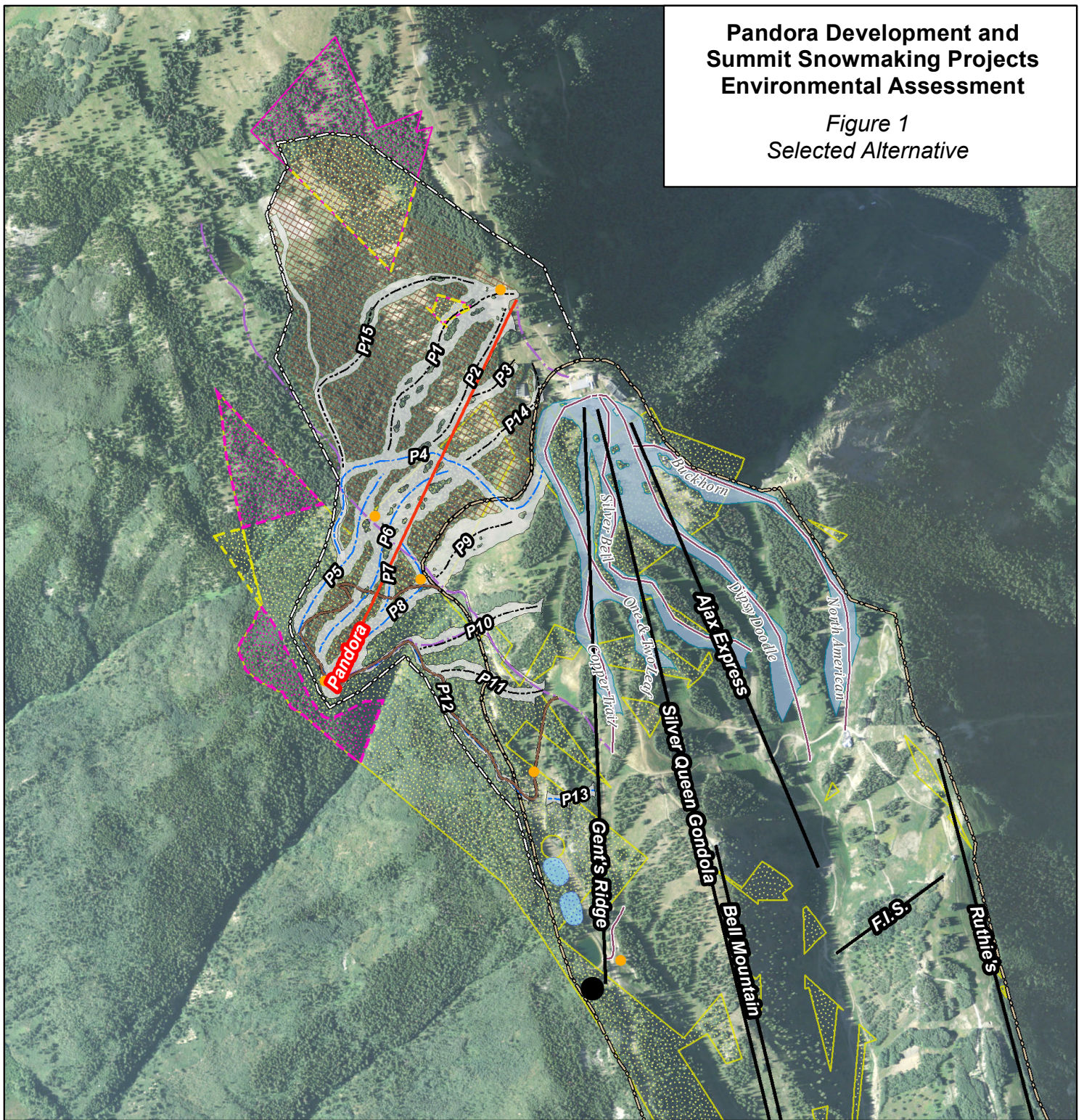
If no objections are filed within the 45-day time period, approval of the decision may occur on, but not before, five (5) business days from the close of the objection filing period.

Contact

Roger Poirier
Acting Deputy District Ranger
Aspen-Sopris Ranger District
White River National Forest
(970) 404-3163
rogerepoirier@fs.fed.us

Pandora Development and Summit Snowmaking Projects Environmental Assessment

Figure 1
Selected Alternative



Approved Pandora Lift and Trails

- Chairlift
- Access Road
- Power Line
- Expert Ski Trail
- Intermediate Ski Trail
- Gladed Terrain
- Operational Boundary Adjustment
- Log Deck Sites

Approved Summit Snowmaking Addition

- Pump Station
- Snowmaking Pipe
- Snowmaking Coverage
- Gent's Ridge Snowmaking Ponds

Approved SUP Area Adjustment

- SUP Area Increase
- SUP Area Decrease

Existing

- Chairlift
- Operational Boundary
- SUP Area (MA 8.22)
- Non-SUP NFS Lands (MA 7.1)



**ASPEN
SNOWMASS.**

0 1,000 2,000'

November 2018. Prepared by: **SE GROUP**

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Appendix A. Project Design Criteria

PDC would be applied to avoid and minimize potential resource impacts from construction and operation of the Proposed Action. These PDC are identified in **Table A-1**. This list supplements the list of BMPs that ASC will be required to prepare for Forest Service prior to the start of construction and implementation.

Table A-1. Project Design Criteria

PROJECT PHASE	PROJECT DESIGN CRITERIA
General	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) All proposed activities and facilities shall meet WRNF Forest Plan and all applicable agency management direction (e.g., Forest Service Handbook and Manual) for all affected resource areas.2) All structures proposed on NFS lands shall be reviewed and authorized in accordance with the WRNF Facility Design Review Guide (2017).3) Prior to starting construction activities on NFS lands, ASC shall develop a Construction Implementation Plan for Forest Service review and authorization. All proposed construction methodologies and practices will be reviewed for compliance with the decision and resource management direction. This plan shall include the following information:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Construction Management</u>: Project timelines, project contracts, disturbance boundaries, grading and site plans, staging and parking areas, construction access, and any required survey information.• <u>Timber management</u>: Defined logging deck areas and skid paths, and protocol for timber removal.• <u>Erosion Control and Drainage Management</u>: Erosion control and drainage management activities.• <u>Post-Construction Revegetation and Restoration</u>: Methodology, locations, vegetative mixes, and soil amendments.• <u>Noxious Weed Management</u>: Weed control methodologies including equipment cleaning, pretreatment, and post-construction monitoring and treatment.• <u>Best Management Practices (BMPs)</u>: Resort BMP list to be employed and adhered to during project implementation.4) ASC shall obtain all required county, town, and state permits prior to the start of construction.
Pre-Construction	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) If tree cutting activities are proposed between March 1 and July 15, surveys for active migratory bird nests should be conducted by a qualified biologist prior to tree cutting. Trees with active nests and snags providing cavity nesting habitat should be retained when practicable, or as otherwise approved by the Forest Service Responsible Official.2) Prior to any ground disturbing activities, project areas shall be surveyed for necessary Forest Service Region 2 sensitive species, including raptors and elk, in consultation with the Forest Service resource specialists.3) Prior to any ground disturbing activities, a soil survey shall be completed.4) All drainage improvements identified for Spar Gulch in the final Hydrology Report shall be included in a Drainage Management Plan to be prepared by a licensed professional engineer and reviewed by the Forest Service prior to authorization and construction.

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Table A-1. Project Design Criteria (cont.)

PROJECT PHASE	PROJECT DESIGN CRITERIA
During Construction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) If undocumented historic and/or prehistoric properties are located during ground disturbing activities or planning activities associated with approved construction activities, all construction in the immediate vicinity shall cease in accordance with 36 CFR § 800.11. 2) The Forest Service shall be contacted if Forest Service Region 2 sensitive plants are discovered within the project area during implementation. 3) To minimize the potential for increasing flows into Keno Gulch, and to address existing erosion within the Upper Spar Gulch watershed, ASC shall implement the following concurrent with the Summit Snowmaking Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair the eroded channel present on <i>Dipsy Doodle</i> and construct a sinuous riprap-lined channel • Where feasible, construct waterbars along existing ski trails within the Upper Spar Gulch watershed on areas of proposed snowmaking. Waterbars should discharge through adequate BMPs for erosion control and into well-vegetated areas. • Improve the roadside ditch that drains Summer Road near Pump House Hill and install rock check dams along the ditch to slow down flow velocities and minimize erosion within the ditch • Install grade controls along the channel of Spar Gulch between County Road 14 and the Summer Ditch diversion to prevent further erosion of the channel • Install BMPs for erosion control at the outlet of existing culverts along Spar Gulch, upstream from Summer Ditch • Install a splitter box on Spar Gulch just upstream from the diversion point with Summer Ditch, to support the maintenance of current runoff volumes diverted toward Keno Gulch 4) To reduce sediment loading in the Lower Spar Gulch watershed, ASC shall implement the following concurrent with the Summit Snowmaking Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regrade, compact, and then line the channel of Spar Gulch below the confluence with Copper Gulch with riprap properly bedded (angular rock of adequate size is available on-site) • Install rock check dams along the channel of Spar Gulch at adequate spacing according to the channel slope • Improve the Spar Gulch trail surface adjacent to the channel. At a minimum, improvements should include construction of new waterbars and repairing existing waterbars to deflect surface runoff from the trail surface into the channel of Spar Gulch. Decommission and revegetate all or a portion of the 20-foot-wide Spar Gulch trail below <i>Kleenex Corner</i>. • Improve the four existing sediment traps adjacent to the Bell Mountain bottom terminal to maximize the amount of sediment that can be detained and reduce flow velocities downstream of these structures. 5) To manage surface runoff in Tributary #1 and Tributary #2 watersheds (refer to Figure 4), ASC shall implement the following concurrent with the Summit Snowmaking Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the roadside ditch along the upper sections of County Road 14 and on Loushin Road that intercept snowmelt runoff originating from trails where new snowmaking coverage is proposed • Install relief culverts along roadside ditches at spacing adequate to the road gradient • Design and install adequate BMPs for erosion and sediment control on all road culverts and waterbars • Implement a BMP maintenance program to inspect, clean, and repair/replace BMPs for erosion and sediment control twice annually: as soon as snowmelt conditions allow and at the end of the summer before snow covers the ground • Where feasible, construct waterbars on existing trails where snowmaking is proposed.

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Table A-1. Project Design Criteria (cont.)

PROJECT PHASE	PROJECT DESIGN CRITERIA
During Construction (cont.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) To prevent additional runoff from <i>Buckhorn</i> from being delivered to the Castle Butte landslide, snowmaking pipeline alignment and drainage structures along Buckhorn shall be reviewed and authorized by the Forest Service prior to construction 7) To prevent the fissure below the proposed Gent's Ridge Pond 2 from expanding and tearing the pond liner, the following measures shall be implemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The upper 6 feet of the fissure will be over-excavated and the stony fissure fill replaced with poorly-graded aggregate. • The granular fill will be covered with a geotextile fabric with appropriate tensile strength. • The pond liner will contain an 18-inch, S-shaped overlap fold to allow it to unfold in the case of rapid horizontal extension of the fissure. 8) Prior to construction of the Gent's Ridge retention ponds, the Forest Service shall review geotechnical reports, design recommendations, dam hazard class analyses, and pond construction plans, all prepared by a licensed professional engineer. 9) To allow ingress and egress of wildlife, snowmaking storage ponds shall be constructed with the following features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least two banks with 5:1 side-slopes • If a liner is used, cover liner with at least 18 inches of topsoil 10) During construction, all food and garbage must be stored in bear-proof containers and hauled off site regularly, and employees and contractors shall not be allowed to have dogs on-site.